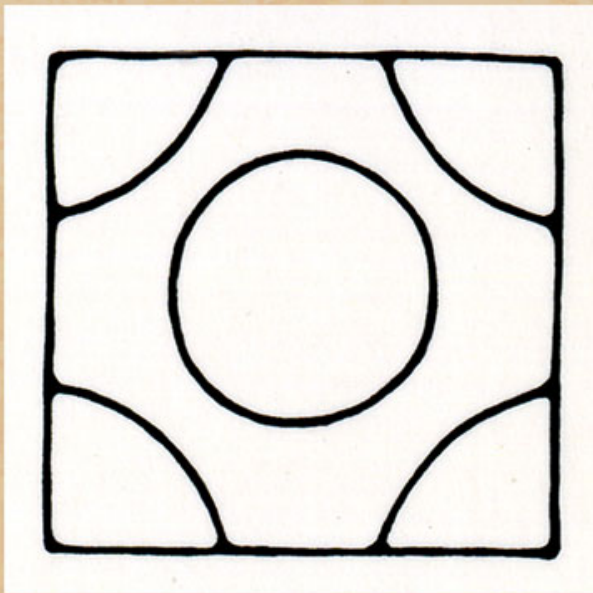


**The Encapsulated Cross:  
A Brief Overview on an  
Abiding Symbol of  
Native American Cosmology**

**By**

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## INTRODUCTION

*Nahui Ollin* means Four Movement (a quatrefoil pattern with the center being its fifth member) in Nahuatl and it also signifies harmony. It refers to the perpetual movement of the universe, integrating and reintroducing the energy and infinite motions of the cosmos. Our age (*Nahui-Ollin*) is the fifth age, fifth creation, or fifth sun that began in the ancient city of Teotihuacan located in Mexico City. According to the deep-time Utoaztecan sacred narrative, all the gods had gathered to sacrifice themselves and create a new age. Although the world and the sun had already been created, it would only be through their sacrifice that the sun would be set into motion and time, as well as history, could begin. The most handsome and strongest of the gods, *Tecuciztecatl*, was supposed to sacrifice himself but when it came time to self-sacrifice, he could not jump into the fire. Instead, *Nanahuatl* the smallest and humblest of the gods, who was also covered in boils, sacrificed himself first and jumped into the flames. The sun was set into motion with his sacrifice and time began. Humiliated by *Nanahuatl's* sacrifice, *Tecuciztecatl* too leaped into the fire and became the moon.<sup>[3]</sup>

The name *Ollin* is of Nahuatl origin. The meaning of *Ollin* is "movement". *Ollin* is generally used as a boy's name. It consists of 5 letters and 2 syllables and is pronounced O-llin. *Ollin* is seen as a pulsating, oscillating, and centering motion representing the concept of change. It is also typified by bouncing balls, pulsating hearts, labor contractions, earthquakes, flapping of the butterfly's wings, the undulating motion of weft activities in weaving, and the oscillating path of the 5th Sun over and under the surface (the ecliptic) of the earth (called *Tlalticpac* in Nahuatl).

*Ollin* is also the motion-change of cyclical completion, i.e., the kind of motion-change exhibited by something as it moves through the four phases of its life-death cycle. **Provide information on the four phases of life-death...**

The shape of *ollin* is thus the shape of a thing's four-phased path through life. Because of this, it is the shape of the life-energy of the 5th Era, the 5th Sun, and all inhabitants of the 5th Era.

*Ollin* motion-change unites conflict, combat, and polemics within an orderly, four-phased cycle. Since it is the essence of motion-change within a cycle, it is sometimes called horizontal motion-change. *Ollin* motion-change is symbolized by such ideograms as the quatrefoil, quincunx, X-shaped cruciform (St. Andrew's cross), +-shaped cruciform (Maltese cross), a ballcourt, the patolli board, **a four-petal flower**, a four-wing butterfly, the *ollin* day-sign glyph, and many differing and **varied versions of a boxed or encircled (encapsulated) cross**. These serve as quintessential symbols of the 5th Era.

*Atlinchinolli* – is in Nahuatl a glyph for the relationship between water and fire.

Atlinchinolli ~  
the glyph for the alchemical relationship  
of water and fire.



Ollin, the glyph of  
movement and  
transformation.

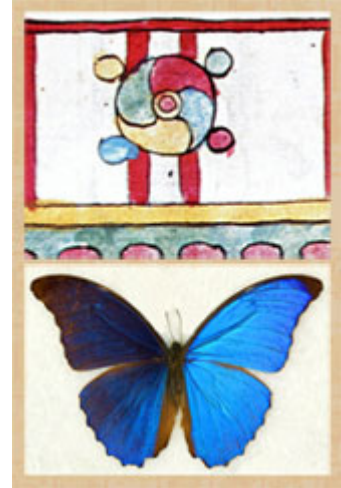


## The Tilma of Juan Diego and the Ollin Flower on the Image of the Virgin of Guadalupe

The location of a four-petal flower known to the Aztecs as *Nahui Ollin* is believed to represent the motherhood of Mary (the mother of Jesus) and is depicted in the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. With its strategic location over her womb, Mary's Image has been suggested as a means to tell the Aztecs in a symbolic way that she is the Mother of the 'sun god' and that this sun god was in her womb and that he was the sole author and giver of life.

The location of the flower is over Mary's womb on the Juan Diego's Tilma image now located in the Basilica in Mexico City. It is known to the Aztecs as "Nahui Ollin" (translated sometimes as "Flower of the Sun"), representing the motherhood of the Virgin of Guadalupe. This image tells the Aztecs she is mother of the "child sun god" who is resident in her womb, who is detailed as the author and giver of life.

The four petal flower that rests over her womb indicates that she is the Mother of God because the four petal flower was a special symbol of life, movement, and deity found in the center of the universe.

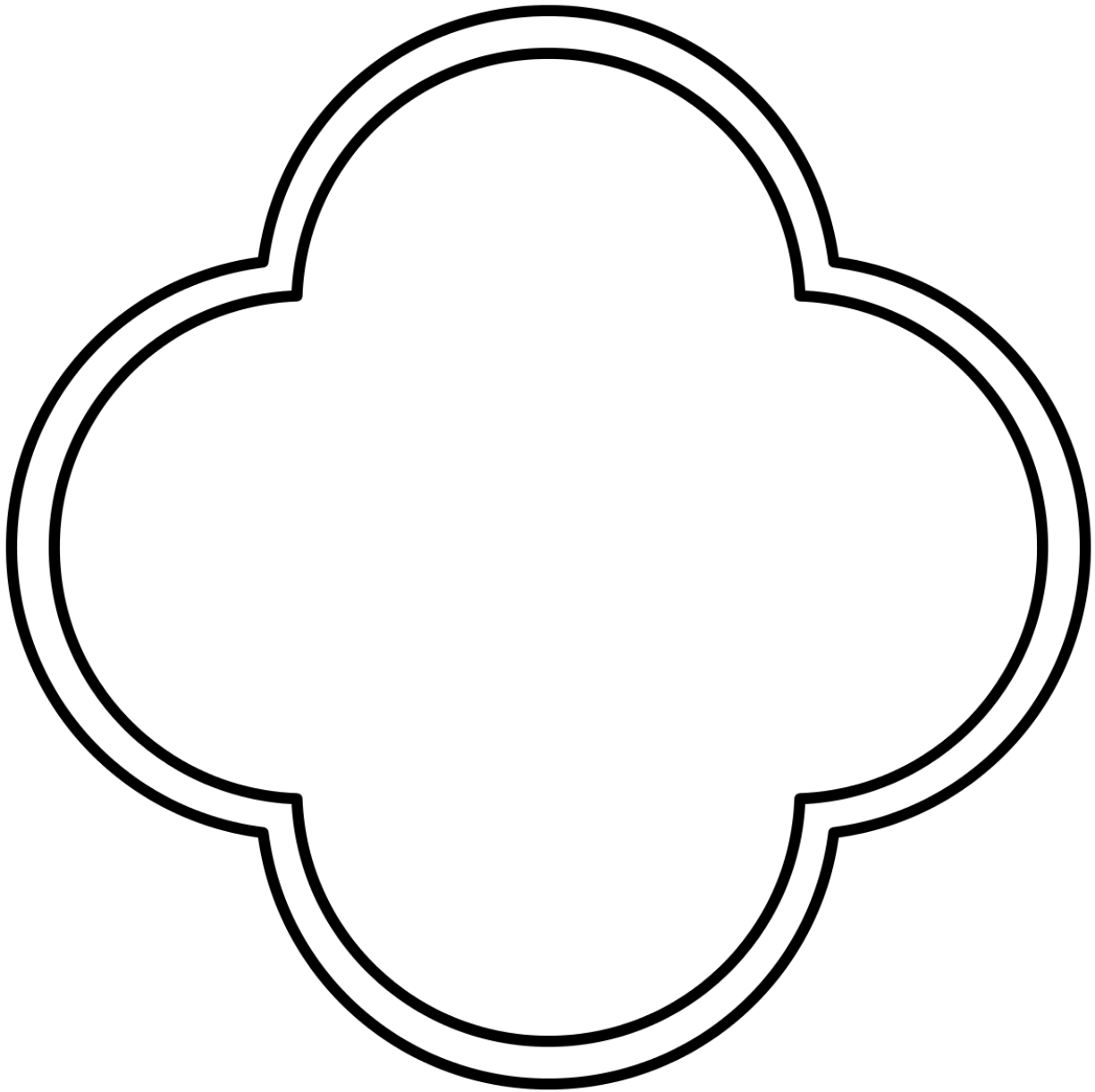


**'Five-rose' design incorporating quincunx and spiral, Codex Magliabecchiano folio 5 (top), four-winged butterfly (bottom)**

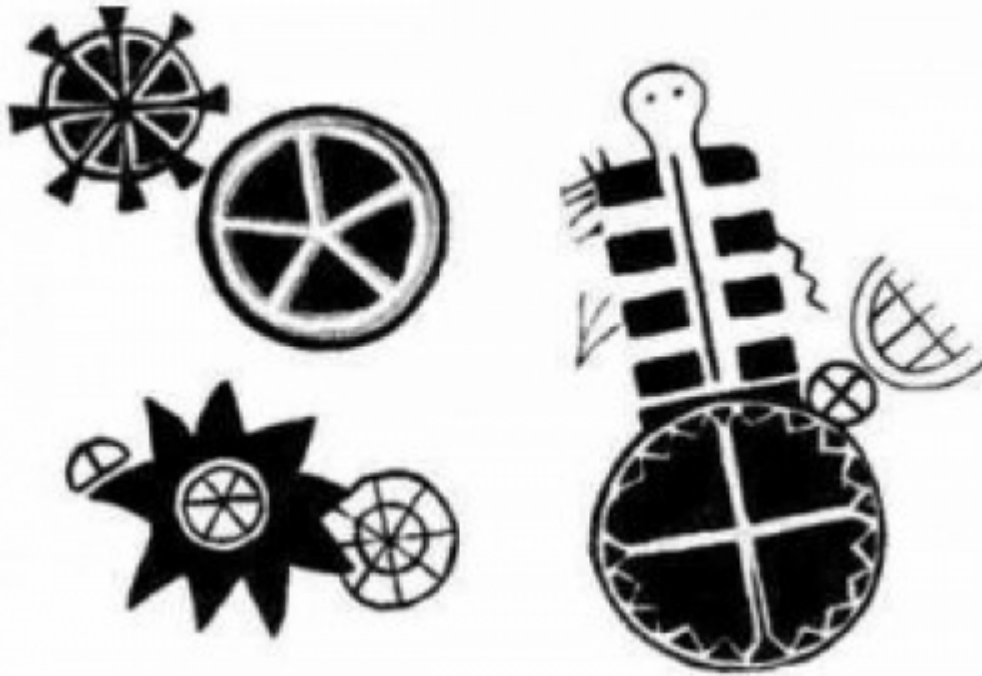


### **The Quatrefoil**

A quatrefoil is a decorative element consisting of a symmetrical shape which forms the overall outline of four with partially overlapping circles of the same diameter. It is found in art, architecture, heraldry, and in traditional Christian symbolism. The word quatrefoil means "four leaves", from Latin quattuor, four, plus folium, a leaf, referring specifically to a four-leafed clover, but applying in general to four-lobed shapes in various contexts.



*Tonantzin* means “Our Sacred Mother” in the Nahuatl language and she continues to be connected symbolically to fertility and the earth. There are many sacred narratives surrounding the Virgin of Guadalupe but she has been recognized by the Catholic Church as a manifestation of the Virgin Mary. The Virgin of Guadalupe has become a national symbol of the Mexican nation and she is viewed by many to be a special protector of Native American peoples and the Americas in general. *Tonantzin* was the name in Nahuatl for the lunar goddess of the pyramid of the moon located at Tepeyac where Juan Diego met with the Virgin of Guadalupe. Significantly, Juan met with her four times.



## Native American Spirituality

Native American Indians are frequently a deeply spiritual people and they communicate their history, thoughts, ideas, and dreams from generation to generation through symbols and signs such as an encircled cross. The traditional meaning of the cross in the circle symbol was that the four equal lines pointed from the center to the spirits of the north, east, south, and west and was also a representation of the Sacred Four elements, the great primary forces of Fire, Air, Water, and Earth.

The meaning of the Broken Cross in a Circle Symbol is that of the whirling logs of movement or a counterclockwise Swastika. The swastika is a type of broken cross symbol, a type of solar cross, with arms bent at right angles, suggesting a whirling or turning motion. The backwards Swastika was a variation of the Cross in a Circle Motif, symbolizing the creative, generative power of the Underworld. The symbol depicts a cross circle as a swastika in which the right angles are depicted as gentle curves and the entire symbol is slightly slanted. The broken cross symbol or the Swastika, is commonly known as the “whirling logs” to many Native Indians, though the literal meaning in the Navajo language “that which revolves”.

## Meaning of the Cross in a Circle Symbol to the Native Americans – the Solar Cross

The sacred, religious Solar Cross, or cross in the circle, is a symbol of the sun and fire and was adopted by many Native American tribes in various forms. The four elements are represented by Native American tribes, notably the Hopi, with the **Solar Cross** or the encircled cross signifying the world (also referred to as the **Cosmic Cross**). The four bars of the cross in the circle represent the cardinal directions north, south, east and west. The elements are the four great primary forces (Earth, Air/Wind, Fire, and Water), or the Sacred Four, emanating from the Creator and these are depicted in the **'Solar Cross' or cross in a circle**.

The air/wind symbol represents life. The fire symbol represents warmth and light. The water symbol represents the sustenance of life. The earth symbol indicates the terrestrial plane where humans abide and that provides life-giving plants and animals.

## Meaning of the Cross in a Circle Symbol – the Hopi *Techqua* Wheel

The cross in the circle symbol is also used as the icon of the Hopi *Techqua* Wheel. The *Techqua* Wheel symbol signifies the world to the Hopi and their representations correspond with the Earth Symbol. The Hopi *Techqua* Wheel symbol means “Together with all nations we protect both land and life and hold the world in balance.”

## To the Aztec...

The Nahui Ollin is at its heart **a symbol of movement** – that means earthquake or shake. Meant to embody expressions of **congregation and generation, attracting and repelling** at the same time, **also in constant movement and rotation**. Hence the Ollin is a metaphor for **celestial movements of the heavenly bodies**. Also intended to manifest the dual essences or binary oppositions in the human world and in nature and to embody the ***principle of integration, dualism and intermediation between opposing forces***. The symbol also represents the four seasons of the years.

The Aztec Symbol is further intended to represent **perfection and transcendence**. The quincunx flower itself has been identified as a **Jasmine flower** – in Nahuatl it is called *Huilacapitzxochitl*. **This the white snow flower or mock orange (*Philadelphus* spp.) of Mexico and the desert west** (Eve Ewing personal communication 2019; Gorny and Rosidon 2016).





The four-petal flower is the only flower of its kind found on the tilma of the Virgin of Guadalupe's robe. It is considered to be one of the highest symbols of the Aztecs as it depicts the four movements of the sun (the four seasons) as well as the cardinal directions of the compass points united in the center by a fifth element giving it balance and equilibrium (as an *axis mundi*). The four petals signify the four past eras with its center signifying **the birth of the Fifth Sun which coincided with the Winter Solstice of 1531** – the manifestation of The Virgin of Guadalupe on the 12<sup>th</sup> of December (from the old calendar that converts to December 21<sup>st</sup> in new calendrics). The 5<sup>th</sup> Sun is hence directly associated with the Sacred Narrative of the Maya, Huichol, and Hopi and perhaps other Utoaztecan and non UA cultures. **It is a central element of the New Fire Ceremony.**

### **Lunar Goddess, Sky Bearers, and the Origin of the Sun: Ethnographic Perspective**

A New Fire Ceremony is recognized for the Aztec (Sahagun 1950-1982, bk 7) and Huichol (Aedo 2003; Carrasco 2008; Myerhoff 1974; Neurath 2002; Preuss 1998, Schaefer and Furst 1996) but also for the Hopi – an American Southwest UA linguistic isolate. This metanarrative is uniformly related to renewal of time and re-inauguration of the sun (cf. Carrasco 2008; Lopez Austin 1997). **It is argued that its earliest expression was coincident with PUA** (proto-Utoaztecan) (Boyd 2016:170, Note 13; Furst and Anguiano 1976). Each of these narratives has many versions and minor variations, however the following are broadly based syntheses or ethnographic summaries of these central creation stories.

#### **Aztec Sacred Fifth Sun Narrative**

The origin of the fifth sun was ushered in by a battle between *Quetzacoatl* and *Tezcatlipoca* (Olivier 2008). After a huge and destructive flood, *Tezcatlipoca* transformed into a new god known as *Mixcoatl*. It was time for the new fire ceremony, *Quetzalcoatl* was ordained to bring a

new wave of people to earth (Leon Portilla 1995). To do this *Mixcoatl* went into the dark, wet, underworld to gather up the skeletal remains of the ancestors (Phillips 1884). He brought the bones to **Snake Woman** (*Cihuacoatl*), **the mother goddess**. She ground them up, put them into a bowl, and he bled on them. At this time the earth's sky world was still dark. **Five ancestral deities** (Aguilar-Moreno 2006), **four of them priests, gathered round a fire**. The four deity-priests asked the fifth, *Nanahuatzin*, the god of ancient lineage, to perform an auto-sacrifice, to throw himself into the fire. He was permitted to do so because the others were too afraid.

As he did so, Sun was born and it was the first day and night. However, Sun would not move. The four stationed themselves at the corners of the earth, with the fifth in the center. The five were positioned to ensure Sun's movement through the sky and to prevent the heavens from falling. **The five sky-bearers are perceived as clouds and entwine together as a great "cloud serpent" that nourishes the land with life-giving rain.** The Mesoamerican moon goddess is described in narrative and symbolized with snakes. These serpents represent lightning, clouds, and most importantly rain.

### **Huichol Origin of the Sun Story**

In the time before time, ancestors abided in the underworld located in the west. It was a time without form, devoid of human kind and shrouded in continuous night. The moon was the singular illumination. The primordial ancestors queried Grandmother Growth (*Nakawe*) what they must do so that the sun would emerge. The decision was made that one of the five pilgrims would perform an auto-sacrifice. Four of the five attempted the task but failed. The fifth - a crippled, youth without a father chose to emulate himself and cast himself into the fire. The youth dropped through five levels of the netherworld, battled ferocious beasts who attempt to kill and eat him. After five days he reached Dawn Mountain and burst forth through the cave door and in doing so was transformed into the Sun Father. Since, his powers had been depleted, Sun could not rise high enough in the heavens and began to descend. Sun began to burn up and melt everything on earth. The five ancestors reassembled to raise the heavens and four were placed at the corners of the cosmos with one in the center - so that the sun would now reside in its proper place. This brief summary is based on material provided in many sources including Boyd (2016:58-59), Furst (1972), Furst and Anguiano (1976), Neurath (2001, 2005a, 2005c), Preuss (1996), and Zingg (1977, 2004).



Figure XX. **"The Sky Bearer and Origin of the Sun Panel"**, Little Petroglyph Canyon, Coso Range, California. Extensively post- processed and filtered with d-Stretch and computer software (Harman 2019) and see (Mukahobaday and Garfinkel 2019) for an in-depth discussion of this panel and its possible significance.



Figure 2 (b). Pen and ink drawing of Origin of the Sun Panel: Lunar Goddess with Snakes, Five Primordial Pilgrim, Pilgrims with Hands aloft Holding up the Sky. Note the crescent moon and sun icons below the Lunar Goddess. Located in Little Petroglyph Canyon, Coso Range, China Lake, California. Age is ca. 2000 BC.

Within the ritual and cosmology of these cultures there are five priests, penitent pilgrims or sky bearers, four in each corner and the fifth in the center. Number 5 is meant as a symbol that represents the following:

- Man meeting god and god meeting man.
- Divinity and transcendence.
- Harmony and beauty.
- The one true god.

Harmonizing opposites is one of the key metaphors for the quincunx, quatrefoil, and Nahui Olin symbols. These related symbols have the following embedded polysemous, compound metaphors:

- Heaven and earth,
- Day and night,
- Good and evil,
- Morning and evening stars (Venus),
- God becomes man, man becomes god.

The cardinal cosmological symbols also have equivalent colors and associations:

North – White, North Star

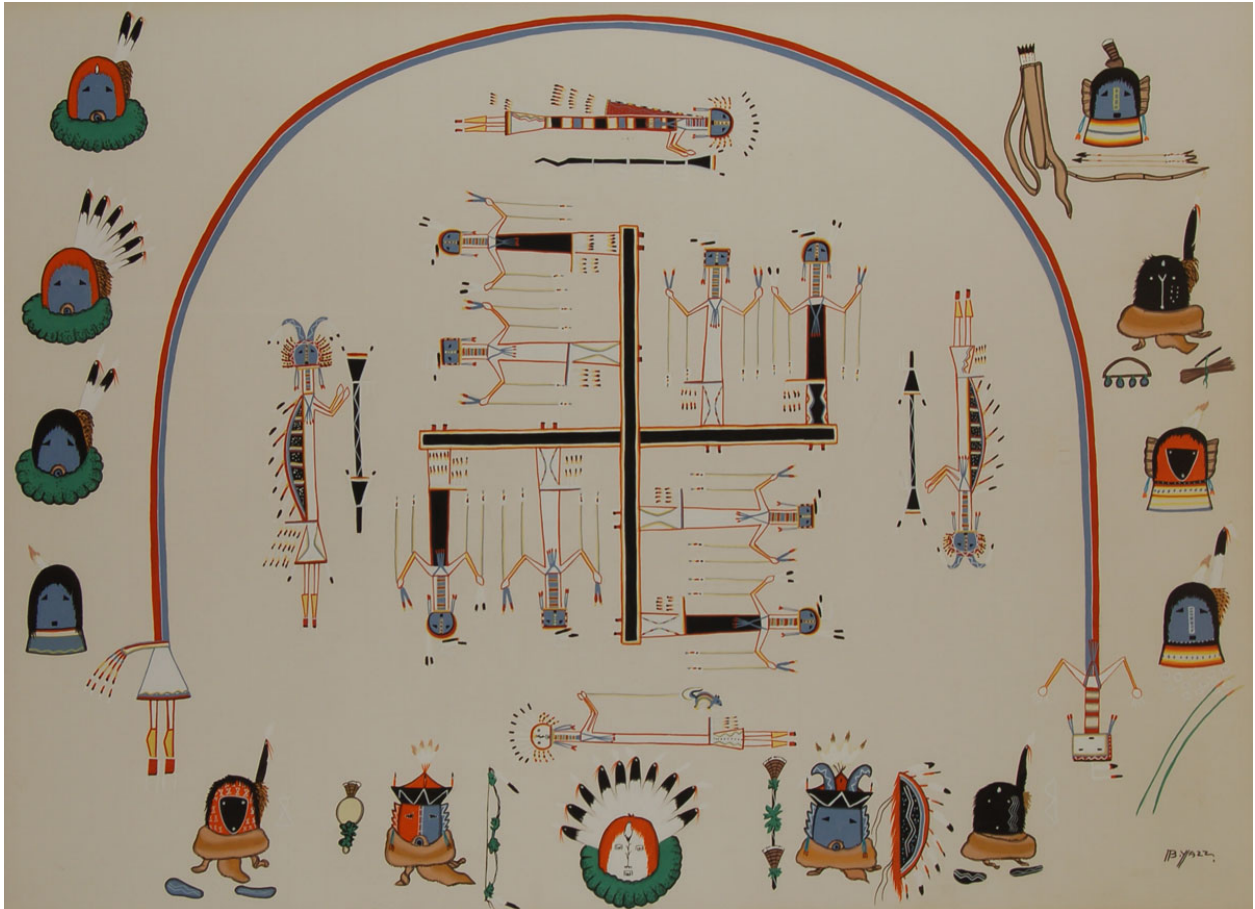
West – Black, dying place of the sun.

East – Red, associated with the birth of the sun.

South – Yellow, right hand of the sun.

Center- World tree, axis mundi

The backwards swastika also represents this four-fold nexus or "the wheel of life" also known as the four ages of man and is in constant motion, with its four arms being birth, youth, maturity, and death.



The quincunx symbolism also implies meanings relating to harmony, balance, transformation, integration, coming of age, and many related concepts.

### **Coso Range Rock Art**

In eastern California, there is a region known as the Coso Range. Coso in Great Basin Paiute Shoshone languages means steam. Here, the Coso Range rock art scholars have recognized an area that appears to have the greatest concentration of prehistoric drawings in the Western Hemisphere. There are many images (a reasonable total is 100,000 elements), as well, some of these depict a quincunx-like symbol. Here are a few of these images as photographed by archaeologists. There are many, many more that could have been included here. I have not as yet made a detailed accounting of the true quantity of these images. A superficial review of the California Rock Art Foundation archive on Coso rock art images identified a least 75 elements.







